The Facets of Morality: A Study of Select Plays by Girish Karnad

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Introduction:

Drama, being an audiovisual medium of expression, has been a very effective and powerful genre in world literature. The emergence and development of drama in ancient Greece, Rome, England and India underscores the fact that the genre has always been an essential part of history and culture which highlights and evaluates social, philosophical, religious, political, economic and moral aspects from time to time. It is mimetic representation of life which combines in itself the fact and fiction, art and reality and presents the life lived-as- it-is and its characters within a dimension of space and time.

Drama in India has rich and glorious convention. As it has its beginning or journey with the Sanskrit plays, which preserve Indian tradition through the theory of drama in *Natyasastra*. Today, there are many playwrights who convey the tradition, culture and history of India effectively; however, drama in India is less successful comparing to other genres of literature. There are some reasons for its less effectiveness. Among them the most essentials are that English is a foreign language and most of the plays are not being performed on the stage. It will be fruitless to be read without being tested on the stage.

Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore, the greatest sage-poets of India, are worth considering Indian playwrights in English. Primarily, Tagore wrote his plays in his mother tongue in Bengali, however some of his plays are available in English. He could successful in sharing contemporary issues very, ethics and ethos of the age, carefully. His *The Post Officer, Natir Puja, Chitra* and *Mukta Dhara* are famous plays. Sri Aurobindo is a major Indian English dramatist and his *Vasavdatta, Rodogune, Perseus the Delivery, The Viziers of Bassora and Eric* are important plays.

Playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Mohan Rakesh and Nissim Ezekiel have seen life very closely and are able to portray it very effectively. Their characters are considered as real men and women of modern age. These playwrights have taken too many efforts to present their characters to portray the real woman and man of the contemporary age. Dramas of them are about love-affairs, absurdity of modern man, and destruction of family as an institution, sexuality and problems of modern society. Ezekiel's play *Nalini* is the play which portrays the real image of a typical type of modern woman who is not the puppet in the control of men of her society. He has portrayed the rebellious woman of his age who is free from men's control. Tendulkar also portrayed modern woman and her private life through his *Silence! The Court is in Session*. His female protagonist of this play, Leela Benare, is well-known in Indian English drama and it won him a position of one of the leading contemporary Indian dramatists. Among his famous plays are: *The Vultures, Encounter in Umbugland, Kamala, Sakharam Binder, Kanyadan, Ghashiram Kotwal* and *A Friend's Story*. His greatness lies in his creation of famous male and female characters and his genius creativity, deep sensitivity, broad vision and profound psychological insight. His sense of ways of the world provides him the position of a greatest playwright of his age. As Irish playwright George Bernad Shaw aims that his writing is not means of merely for entertainment, but means of social improvement, Tendulkar's plays bring reformation in ways of thinking of people of all the ages.

As Tendulkar and Ezekiel, Mohan Rakesh has observed life very keenly and closely. His protagonists express modern man and problems of contemporary time. He, primarily, focuses on problems on familial level. His *Halfway House* is real portrait of problematic and distractive family. His play reminds readers Eugene O'Neill's play *Mourning Becomes Electra*, in which a

family is divided because of immorality. His characters are morally transgressed as in O'Neill's, because they are filled with over sexuality and it is the cause of divide of modern society.

In the post-Independence era Indian English Drama could not make a noteworthy presence unlike novel and poetry. However, some of the eminent playwrights are: Asif Currimbhoy, Gurucharan Das and Pratap Sharma who could successfully staged. The most prolific dramatist of post-Independence period is Asif Currimbhoy who has written and published more than thirty plays. Among his noteworthy plays are *The Restaurant* (1960), *The Doldrummers* (1960), *The Captives* (1963), *Goa* (1964), *Monsoon* (1965), *Inquilab* (1970), *The Refugee* (1971) and *Sonar Bangla (1*972). His most important themes are history and contemporary politics, social and economic problems, the east-west encounter, philosophy, religion and psychological conflicts. Pratap Sharma, one of the post-Independence dramatists, wrote two prose plays: *A Touch of Brightness* (1968) and *The Professor has a Warchy* (1970). His plays has staged abroad successfully, but are failed to be staged in India. Sex remains the major issue in his plays as in some of the Tendulkar's.

When Indian English Drama was struggling for its survival and identity Mahesh Dattani's contribution made an incarnating presence in the world of plays. Before his time, Indian English Drama was merely confined to diverse phases of imitations and translations, but because of his contribution he brought drama at par with Western or European practice and tradition. He made an experimentation, innovations and exploration with different style in art, themes, techniques and craft. He is dramatist of contemporary realities and almost of all his plays are based upon the burning issues of the contemporary society. Through his plays he advocates the fundamental rights of the common people, complexities of human relationship, issues of similar sex, sexual abuse of child, gender hierarchy, communal tension, morality of middle class family, conflict between

modernity and tradition, patriarchy, eunuchs, woes of women, issues of child labour, complications of HIV positive sufferers and homosexuality. On such a vast social issues he writes vastly. His important plays *Where There is a Will* deeply rooted in Gujarati family setup, is about colourless relationships between the couples that comprise the family. His *Dance Like a Man* is a drama on the conflict between modernity and tradition. His characters are men and women of rebellion; they fight against the society and its customs that prevents them to live freely. His *Tara* is about a typical Indian woman protagonist, who tries to create a new identity. Besides it is based on gender discrimination. *Final Solutions* is about the subordination of women in Indian society. Furthermore, all his plays are a voice of voiceless and unvoiced. According to him marginalized are always marginalized.

Girish Karnad is one of the greatest playwrights of India along with Badal Circar and Vijay Tendulkar who shares an essential position in Indian Writing in English Drama. He is versatile writer wrote in Kannada and translated into English. Karnad sought popularity with the publication of his two major plays *Tughlaq* in 1972 and *Hayavadana* in 1975. In his most plays like Y*ayati, Tughlaq, Hayavadana, Naga-Mandala, Tale-Danda, Dreams of Tipu Sultan, Bali* and *Fire and the Rain* he uses history, myth, folk tale and issues of morality.

His play *Hayavadana* is based upon the myths which Karnad had borrowed its theme from *Kathasaritsagara*, originally from Thomas Mann's *Transposed Heads*. In the play he ridicules the philosophy of the head being superior to the body. His early plays pose different problems of human identity in a world of tangled relationships. Besides myth, history, folk tale and human identity, he underscores and questions the very problem of morality in his earliest plays.

Naga-Mandala is based upon two oral tales from Karnataka which Karnad listened several years ago from Professor A. K. Ramanujan and wrote the play during the year he spent at the University of Chicago. Though the play is on myth, he chooses its plot from history and epics. He uses here various conventions, the chorus, music, comic interludes and so on, however here too he underscores the problem of morality for human being as well as god. Here, too, Karnad shows, Rani, the queen, transgress the boundaries of morality.

In *The Fire and the Rain*, Karnad uses myths from *Mahabharata.* Through this play he has given high richness to Indian English Drama. His contribution goes beyond theatre, because he has put forth the reality of Indian reality before the audience and readers more clearly. Although he had realized that there was no much scope for drama in India, he went on writing plays and achieved significance in the field. Today, no study of Indian Drama in English can be completed without inclusion of Girish Karnad. In the play he again underscores the moral issues. He never hesitates criticizing the roles of gods.

In his recent play *Wedding Album*, he focuses on a middle-class urban Saraswat Brahmin family. Again it is based on modern myth. The main theme in the play is its counselling of class, creed, caste discrimination, sexual and conjugal behaviours, chastity, obedience, basics of Hindu marriage system and above all moral issues in the society. He presents picture of urban middle-class family and their culture, beliefs, personal liberty, desires and hopes and ways of morality.

His 2005 *Flowers and Images: Two Dramatic Molologues* is a monologue. The theme and subject of the plays of *The Flowers* and *Divine Snow* are imaginary, outlandish and about dream-like reverie. It further marks the use of myths, legends and folk tales. Again Karnad underscores the theme of morality in both the plays and handles it with very carefully. The plot of the play is

borrowed from folk-tale from the Chitradurga region in Karnataka. It presents the conflict between erotic love and religious devotion.

Hypothesis:

The researcher assumes that Girish Karnad's plays including *Wedding Album, Flowers and Driven Snow* portray aspects of morality with special reference of myth, history and folk-tales.

1. The proposed research would represent the facets of morality in the play of Girish Karnad entitled *Wedding Album* in the perspective of Indian myth, culture and folk-tale.
2. The proposed research would represent the facets of morality in the play of Girish Karnad *Driven Snow* in the perspective of Indian culture, myth, folk-tale and religion.
3. The proposed research would represent the facets of morality in the play of Girish Karnad *Flowers* in the perspective of Indian culture, myth, folk-tale and religion.

Aims and Objectives:

The proposed research aims to study the select plays of Girish Karnad, in the context of culture, history, religion, man woman relationship etc. The study will underneath the different aspects of morality through various themes like culture, history, man woman relationship, folk-tale and so on.

1. The proposed research aims at studying the facets of morality in Girish Karnad's *Wedding Album*

2. The proposed research aims at studying the facets of morality in Girish Karnad's *Flowers and Images: Two Dramatic Monologues*
3. The proposed research aims at studying the facets of morality in Girish Karnad's *Driven Snow*

Data, Scope and Limitations:

The present study will be limited to the selected dramas of Girish Karnad i.e. Wedding Album, *Flowers and Images: Two Dramatic Monologues* and *Driven Snow*. Besides enough and available printed and electronic material will be chosen for the research topic. The scope of this research is that it covers various aspects of facets of morality in the plays of Girish Karnad.

Research Methodology:

The methodology to be adopted for the research is descriptive, interpretative, analytical and critical with the help of printed and electronic, primary, secondary and tertiary sources. The data will be critically and analytically evaluated in order to present the various facets of morality in the dramas of Girish Karnad.

Justification of the Research:

The present research work will be an attempt to analyse the techniques and skills used by Girish Karnad to present themes of morality in effective way. The research will be helpful to be

acquainted with the various techniques and skills used by the dramatist and how his plays are unique to be studied.

Pedagogical Implications:

The present studies of selected plays of Girish Karnad explore the various themes of his plays with the help of techniques and skills used by him. It will be beneficial in the classroom discussion for teachers and students of English Literature and readers of Indian English Literature. The proposed study will focus light on various themes used by him with the help of his art of dramatisation. So it will be beneficial at academic and intellectual level.

Tentative Chapter Scheme:

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter tries to focus on the reflection of issues of aspects of morality in the plays of Girish Karnad. It will concentrate the biographical background of Girish Karnad and his techniques and skills of writing play as well as drama as a genre. Also the introductory chapter will be about the hypothesis, methodology, plan, and review of related literature, especially Indian English Dramas.

Chapter Two: A General Study of Karnad's Plays

This chapter will be about the general study of Karnad's dramas. It will focus some of the other aspects of his plays as religious, political, economic, cultural and historical themes in the plays.

Chapter Three: The Facets of Morality in the Plays of Girish Karnad

This chapter is the title chapter or main chapter of the thesis. It will focus strictly on the various issues of morality that the author mentions in his plays. The chapter will be critical and analytic study of his plays as well as his main theme of morality.

Chapter Four: Critical and Thematic Analysis of Karnad's Plays

This chapter will concentrate on the thematic study of Karnad's plays and will analyse its plays.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This chapter will summarize the arguments of the earlier chapters and would include conclusions, suggestions and recommendations for further study.

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